4.1 On female employees of aid organisations

20. For those female staff who continue to work, the decree has caused changes to aspects of their modus operandi. In some cases they have had to reduce mobility and visibility by, for instance, travelling in cars with no aid agency insignia. Some women who are working in areas other than health have been retained as waged labour with the implications being unclear as neither the aid agencies nor the MoFA have come up with a satisfactory definition of waged labour. Some agencies are opting for contracting and facilitating work for women through mahrams. This allows women to work while reducing their visibility in certain cases. Where women have no mahrams, it sometimes reduces their mobility and opportunity to work.

21. The psychological impact of the decree on female employees of aid agencies has been increased levels of anxiety, fear, demoralisation, frustration, and feelings of humiliation at their lack of power to ameliorate their own situation. There was despair from those who thought that years of education and work experience were about to be wasted. For those with no employment this is a reality. There is marked paranoia about potential loss of employment, where a number of contenders - real and imaginary - are seen by these women as poised to take their jobs as soon as they have been removed from their positions. The list of contenders includes men and other women related or affiliated to the Taliban. Some women reported that some of their male colleagues were happy to see the back of them. There was one notable exception where male staff were instrumental in negotiating with the Taliban on behalf of female staff and getting them back to work. Women reported tensions at home, with husbands who were unemployed, and to feelings of discomfort within their communities as women who were unemployed became envious of their employed status. Women are becoming anxious about how useful or replaceable they seem to their expatriate employers to the extent that tensions between female employees in units of some organisations have led to violence. (see A.4 for details on the impact of the decree on female employees for individual agencies)

22. The above points are leading to a condition where there is little or no solidarity between female staff as they agonise, contend and struggle to keep their jobs in the face of potential attacks from opponents - real and imaginary. Women expressed their absolute need to work in order to ensure the survival of their families. They see themselves as working within an increasingly risky environment, but as long as they have the responsibility of being the sole breadwinners in the family and as long as aid agencies pay relatively high salaries they are willing to brave these risks. Potential loss of work not only spells loss of livelihood, for those whose husbands are unemployed, but also loss or reduction of rights within the family. In the present circumstances of high male unemployment and scarce resources, for some women salaries give them leverage and rights within the family.

4.2 On beneficiaries and programme implementation

23. From the perspective of the Taliban, the impact of the decree is limited to programmes involving women, whereas the aid community has been considering responses which are potentially broader - impacting all programmes (Gender Advisor to the UN system in Afghanistan). This is especially the case if the decree is, as one NGO worker put it, a smoke-screen for the Statutes. The decree has hampered some surveying and monitoring and evaluation activities that involve women. At this juncture it is important to note that, to monitor the spectrum of programme activities relating to women and to improve access to Afghan female beneficiaries, it is essential for UN agencies to maintain both international and national women staff. With the drought and current economic situation in Afghanistan, it is evident that the situation for beneficiaries would deteriorate if aid agencies chose to pull out. Food and health care are areas of priority concern. Aid agencies and the local populations alike are worried that family welfare and rights may suffer if programs are suspended over women's rights. The situation as regards food distributions, surveys, education and operations outside Kabul and other urban centres is unclear as it is constantly changing. (see A.4 for details on the impact of the decree on programme implementation for a selection of individual agencies)

4.3 On the perspective of the general population

24. Community responses, as reported by aid agencies, have varied. At one end of the spectrum, shuras and groups of beneficiaries have: proactively lobbied local Taliban authorities to restore the rights of women to work, found ways of accommodating restrictions on female employment, or ignored the decree altogether. At the other end of the spectrum are those community elders trying to enforce the decree, or steering clear of any situations where they would have to interact with the Taliban over the issue.

25. Women interviewed in Kabul, from both conservative and moderate backgrounds, generally felt that women should have the opportunity to work, but that if that proved impossible assistance should not be cut under the present circumstances, since sections of the community were struggling with drought and war-induced poverty. These women felt that excessive "proselytising" on their behalf on the international stage usually resulted in further clamp downs on women within Afghanistan. The issue is not whether we should advocate or not, but what issues we choose to focus on, how hard we advocate and what mode of advocacy we choose. It was generally felt by men and women alike that the "woman question" has once again been subverted by those who wish to further their own designs, political and self-serving. Several different groups of women pointed to the atrocities perpetrated by previous warring factions, their restrictive and discriminatory attitude to women, and

questioned the logic behind singling out the Taliban for vilification.

4.4 On relations between the aid community and the authorities

26. It seems that there will be no complete reversal on the decree, but that there could be negotiations to find out modalities for increased control and monitoring as envisaged by the authorities and the readiness of aid agencies to accept them (Gender Advisor to the UN system in Afghanistan). Such negotiations and continuous dialogue should involve some of the different technical departments (MoFA, MoP, MoRR, MoSA). The aid community should also try and bring MoJ and V&V into this process, as the latter is the 'single most important ministry of the Taliban authorities affecting the lives of women' (Coomaraswamy, 2000). The MoU (signed May 1998) contains ambiguities on the issue of female employment, and offers both threats and opportunities to the UN system in their discussions with the Taliban.

27. Kabul has always been seen as the tense nexus of Taliban-aid community interaction. The aid community seems willing to adhere to the belief that there exist "pockets of exemption" in Afghanistan where decrees and real Taliban authority cannot penetrate. This applies most especially to some rural areas, which may appear to have enjoyed a form of exemption. Current attempts by the Taliban to more uniformly enforce the decree may mean that this is soon no longer the case.

28. For two years preceding the issuance of the decree, a number of aid agencies felt that a certain level of trust had been built with the Taliban, and that "verbal approvals" had allowed progress to made with regard to female employment. To a certain extent, the aid community had also relied on exploiting the inconsistencies and differences that seem to exist between "official" and "unofficial" positions, and between the different parts (ministries) and levels of the Taliban. While the non-monolithic nature of the Taliban has allowed a certain amount of flexibility in relations with the aid community, the issue of the decree has revealed that there are clear limits to this approach. According to the MoFA, media reports that different ministries were not in agreement on the issue of the decree "were not helpful", causing a decision to be taken "at the highest level" that bound all the Ministries to "speak with one voice". If the aid community is "to continue to negotiate [their] way by sounding out who's who in the Taliban ministries and who is more powerful" (INGO respondent), then they must do so in an extremely discreet manner. (see A.4 for details on the impact of the decree on relations with the authorities, for a sample of individual agencies).

29. The Taliban appear to feel that sanctions and lack of recognition by the UN are a foregone conclusion and that nothing that they do will change the status quo on these issues. This creates tensions in relations with the aid community who are the major representatives of

the international community inside Afghanistan. To unpack this issue further, the unilateral sanctions imposed by the US on Afghanistan, and their key role in the imposition of UN sanctions, complicates relations with "Western" aid agencies. Islamic NGOs (and the OIC) who are an interface to another part of the international community appear not to be viewed with similar misgivings by the Taliban.

5. What the exemption of the health sector means in practice

30. Of the 11 occupations which are permissible for women, it would seem that some fit under the health umbrella, though it is unclear how many, as the list is currently unavailable. Experiences of aid agencies vary, with those working more closely with the MoPH suffering fewer restrictions than those agencies that have avoided working through the structures of the ministry. In the immediate period following the issuance of the decree, agencies advised female staff to stay away from work because of a lack of clarity from within the Taliban (particularly the MoPH) over this issue. Aid agencies have since been sending women employed in health care projects back to work, after confirming that their employment is still tenable and that this does not entail any threats to their security. (see A.4 for details on what the exemption of the health sector means in practice for a sample of individual agencies).

31. Whilst initially there appeared to be regional disparities regarding the enforcement of the decree it would seem that over time the Taliban are bringing regional authorities in line with central policy. Those organisations who had been willing to establish a working relationship with the MoPH had more room to manoeuvre in relation to the exemption for female employment within the health sector than those who chose to keep their operations distinct from the MoPH. The Taliban authorities have become aware of some NGOs "cheating" by employing staff to perform one task while they are in reality doing something different. In relation to the decree, caution must be exercised by those agencies which have considered camouflaging non-health projects and staff as health-related, to exploit the opportunities offered by the exemption.

6. Broader policy issues

32. In contexts, where the local community is conservative - especially in its dealings with women - and therefore has appropriate "moral" credentials in the eyes of the Taliban, relations with aid agencies are more or less regulated and influenced by community power holders. There is however a limit to the authority that the community can or will exercise, and a concomitant limit in their ability to influence the Taliban. Reasons for this may be that the community is more conservative than the Taliban (as in parts of Paktia), Taliban sympathisers, or frightened of the Taliban. In relation to programmes addressing gender

and women's issues, the possibilities of making headway simply by disengaging with urban contexts and their concentrations of Talib authority, and moving to rural contexts may only lead to limited success.

33. In Kabul and some other urban centres not all sections of society are considered to have the necessary moral credentials and are therefore heavily policed. In such environments, contact between aid agencies and groups, which are considered especially "morally" vulnerable, such as female headed households, may create negative reactions if handled insensitively. Experience suggests that for non-Afghan organisations the greater the degrees of separation that exist between female beneficiaries or Afghan female staff and expatriate males, the smoother the operations.

34. A key failure of Afghanistan as a national project has been a recurrent inability to build the social fabric in a consensual manner, which takes on board the full range of perspectives from the most reactionary to the most progressive. The entire debate about modernity, development and progress in Afghanistan has always been dominated, unavoidably but perhaps unhelpfully, by the "woman question". Although this is of prime importance in any context, with women forming at least half of the population, and being the primary educators of future generations, it may be unwise for the aid community to adopt anything other than low key and culturally sensitive ways of engaging with Afghan women. As uncomfortable as this may seem it tunes in to the perspective of numerous Afghan women interviewed for this paper who emphasised that the way forward was through creating a future for their children - both male and female. Afghan women interviewed for this paper seemed mostly concerned for the rights of their children as mothers and then concerned for their own rights as women. Hence, some women working in Afghanistan are willing to wear a burqa, use public transport, use tactics to evade Taliban attention and run risks to ensure that they can continue their work primarily so as to meet family needs, rather than their own individual needs.

35. Attempting to engage with Afghanistan from a developmental perspective risks adopting gender relations and gender equality as symbols of modernity and progress, with which to point out everything that is "wrong" and "bad" in traditional or customary society. While suggesting a shift of focus to children it is recognised that such an approach is problematic and fraught with difficulties and contradictions. For example, some Afghans are protective of those individuals (children) and institutions (schools) which in time could alter the perceived traditions upon which they believe Afghan society to be based, and hence are suspicious of education which could threaten the status quo. Part of this sensitivity is a legacy of Soviet attempts at social engineering through education. In this context the Taliban have been particularly restrictive of female access to education, especially for girls over the age of nine.

36. The point is not to downplay the importance of gender issues, since it is clearly understood that effective programming for the vulnerable necessitates the participation of women, but to try and adopt a less "visible" and abrasive course of action in programming. This could be achieved through addressing the family, not exclusively focusing on women and girls, but being mindful of a whole range of needs which exist. Where appropriate this could involve a combined strategy of reaching mothers through children and children through mothers. This perspective has been partially elaborated by a UNICEF staff member whose thinking can be summarised as follows: the need for advocacy on behalf of children, exploring new channels for reaching children and paying greater attention to the needs of adolescents through strong programs. Substantive issues could include disability due to landmine injuries, child labour, child soldiers, psychosocial issues, early/forced marriages, trafficking, lack of a juvenile justice system and IDP/refugee/returnee issues. This is not necessarily a new strategy but perhaps a reprioritisation of existing efforts.

37. Whether Afghan women take a public role or not is ultimately a decision made by Afghans at all levels (family, tribe, nation) and in the face of this, the aid community and all other proxy agents who are affecting decision making in the Afghan context must be aware of the relatively limited role that they can play in the process of social development in Afghanistan. Given this limited role, the aid community should take heed of Angela King's (1997) caveat that women should not be forced to take on public roles which they might not otherwise assume as such an approach '[i]nstead of creating a social and psychological community of support,.rather creates resentments that reinforce existing inequalities' leading to '[w]omen, and families.[being] further penalized by conditions that were intended to help them'. Although Afghan women interviewed for this paper are enthusiastic about gender programming and gender training they often only see themselves in the role of passive recipients, complaining that their family and cultural structures do not support the equal rights of men and women. While recognising the spectrum of realities that women experience, women should perhaps be approached primarily in a role which fits a model that is perhaps more culturally apt and Islamic, and does not employ "alien", "Western" concepts of the woman as an individual and independent social agent.

38. Without wishing to seem tautological, it is well recognised that Afghanistan has always been a family oriented society and that it is therefore important to orientate aid agency responses towards the family. However, it is also recognised that, in itself, the Afghan family unit is not an unproblematic and homogenous social unit, rather it contains a variety of interests and connections, deployed as part of a larger coping strategy. These can be combined or opposed to offer threats and opportunities according to the circumstances. Choosing a suitable focal point for contact within the family unit is another

difficulty about which there is little or no consensus. Since children are the social capital of the future, aid delivery to families characterised by a more concerted effort to focus on children, and to address their rights, may potentially offer useful ways forward.

39. The current dominant political authority structure in Afghanistan (Taliban) is in many ways a product of the role of "education" in geopolitics, namely external (Saudi and other Arab world) funding of Madrasas in Afghanistan, NWFP and Baluchistan (for refugees). This form of education has filled the void left by the destruction of the Afghan education system and the decline of donor assistance for refugee education following the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992. It is important to note that the social group which is increasingly being "missed" by aid programming in Afghanistan and Pakistan i.e. Afghan male children and adolescents, have been inducted into the institutions (Madrasas) which helped to create, and continue to sustain, the Taliban.

40. Women cannot be marginalised from the approach discussed above, as they generally have a major role in the upbringing of children. But one perspective that may offer a way forward is if the aid community approach women via their role within the family unit and local community. This is by no means a permanent solution to the "woman question" in Afghanistan but serves as an interim strategy as the aid community admits its mistakes, cut its losses and seeks to maintain a policy of engagement. A long term approach, which focuses on children and draws in men and women, in their role as parents and members of the community in which children will learn to socialise, potentially lays the groundwork for the sustainability of gender equity in Afghanistan. Education can reinforce existing practices in Afghanistan or gradually give Afghans potentially new perspectives on the role of women in the public sphere.

7. Larger Picture

41. The sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, on the Taliban, on 14 November 1999 (Resolution 1267), and subsequently strengthened on 19 December 2000 (Resolution 1333), are a significant feature of the larger picture that surrounds the decree and its implications. It can be argued that sanctions make the Taliban less willing to compromise. In the words of the MoFA "whatever we do the international community is against us". The United States and Russia have held further discussions within the Security Council about the possibility of toughening up the sanctions (BAAG, June 2000). Recognition is another important issue. It is perhaps unsurprising that the MoPH states that "If the UN gives us recognition and the seat, then relations will be greatly improved." It is hard to predict the politico-military future of the Taliban; they may become widely recognised by other governments, they may fragment under internal factional pressures, or they may power share with the United Front. While it is unclear which (if any) of these scenarios will

materialise, these possible developments, along with military advances in Takhar and Badakhshan in 2000, point to the potential emergence of a new political landscape, which the aid community must be ready to respond to.

42. Some within the aid community believe that the Taliban are increasingly looking to assert their sovereignty, especially in relation to the activities of the aid community. Some respondents saw the decree and the increased monitoring by the Taliban, of activities and programmes with women and men, not only as a "woman's issue" but as a "control issue". This is evidenced by the new Statutes governing relations between the Taliban, UN and NGOs, the office set up within MoJ entitled "the Supervision Department for the Application of edicts and Rules" and comments from the Taliban about aid agencies "doing work which is the equivalent of running Afghanistan but not involving [ministry] professional staff". While some feel that there appears to be a growing desire on the part of the Taliban to present ministries and state organs as efficient and capable whilst simultaneously looking for ways to improve their capacity, others suspect more mercenary motives.

43. In the current context, Afghan people interviewed see no rights for men or women. Some members of the aid community view women's rights as a luxury while others have clear policy commitments to promote those rights. Although one Taliban interlocutor expressed the view that "there are no human rights, just force", the Taliban as an institution has often tried to present itself as the champion of women's honour/rights. An atmosphere of hope for the future is largely missing in Afghanistan. Soaring prices for fake passports and illegal passage to Europe, North America and Australia, the hijacking of the Ariana flight to London, and cunning attempts to fit criteria for asylum and protection programmes suggest that from the Afghan perspective - except for those profiting from the war economy - people see their only hope for happiness and survival outside Afghanistan. One Afghan woman described the situation within Afghanistan as one of parasites living off parasites. Attempts from those outside to advocate on behalf of those inside Afghanistan were viewed by the majority of those Afghans interviewed, who reside inside the country, with cynicism and mistrust. This seems to be aggravated by the fact that the priorities and agendas of those outside the context sometimes seem to be out of sync with the realities as expressed by the wider range of interests and views that exist on the ground. Until advocates begin to have more meaningful contact with those within the context and until their efforts begin to bear fruit within Afghanistan, those left "burning in hell" will regard their authenticity as suspect.

8. Terms of engagement

44. It must be recognised that, over the issue of gender, the Taliban seem to be being proactive while the aid community seem to be being

reactive. A fundamental impediment to a more pro-active stance by the aid community is the lack of dialogue between the aid community and the dominant driving forces within the Taliban movement, namely Mullah Omar, MoJ and V&V. The UN seems to have established a practice of dealing with the Taliban through MoFA and MoP and feels that it is impractical for the UN system to engage with all the line ministries. Related to this, the role of JCC in the process of UN engagement with the Taliban remains unclear, though formerly some progress, particularly with middle level interlocutors, had been made through this framework.

45. The issue of the use of expatriate supervisors in surveys revealed that if agencies are seeking to respond to the decrees by only dealing with line ministries or local authorities then they have to recognise the limits of authority that individual ministries, local representatives and the council of ministers as a whole have within the overall architecture of the Taliban. While an agency may have approval and have established rapport with a line ministry, such a working relationship can be overturned or undercut when the issues concerned run counter to the interests of more powerful ministries, or present a threat to the foundation of the Taliban movement.

46. The aid community is a mosaic of interests and perspectives. There is as yet no single approach or strategy that aid agencies would be happy to subscribe to. From a spectrum of views and analyses, flow a range of strategies and modalities. The view of a particular agency is tempered by flexibility, gender-sensitivity, number of female staff (plus ratio to male staff), degree to which principles guide operations, gender prioritisation by donors, the nature of projects, willingness to engage with the Taliban, level of integration with Taliban authority structures, funding constituency, type of organisation (solidarity, international, Islamic, Afghan), geographical location of projects, and the scale and spread of operations. Translated into action in the face of the recent decrees, responses (vis-à-vis terms of engagement) range from avoidance of all confrontation and a "tiptoe" approach to those who advocate for selective disengagement.

47. Trying to accommodate and consolidate these varying perspectives and interests is problematic. With such a diverse and complex array of interests and interfaces it is difficult to construct a unified response to underlie a negotiation process which satisfies all perspectives and constituencies. The Taliban add to these difficulties by trying to deal with agencies on an individual basis. In part this may be explained by a "war thinking" within the Taliban, which seeks to "divide and conquer". The apparent rotation of Taliban personnel between military (the fronts) and administrative (the ministries) roles may add to this situation. However, the Taliban also seem to generalise from their experiences with individual aid agencies, to the aid community as a whole, and the Statutes suggest that the Taliban may be seeking to make their relations with aid agencies more uniform. In this context it needs to be stressed that while flexibility within the aid community is useful, and agencies

may be able to make headway with the Taliban on an individual basis, they need to constantly be aware of the broader ramifications of their actions for the aid community as a whole.

48. It may be inadvisable for the aid community to opt for a single implementation strategy. There is room for more than one ground-level approach - for example implementation accompanied by advocacy, adaptation, or a wait-and-see approach. It is however imperative for operational and non-operational agencies to reach consensus on when a particular approach is most suitable, taking into consideration the type of agency, in addition to operational principles and requirements. Without effective "gender" co-ordination there will be little or no overall coherence in the aid community's response to "gender" crises. The lack of co-ordination between gender focal points and advisors denies meaningful opportunities for learning lessons, or assessing the relevance and effectiveness of promoting women's participation. With rare exceptions (e.g. HABITAT Community Fora for Women), efforts have focused on soliciting women's participation or mere presence in programmes but there has been little effort to measure or increase women's share in decision-making or in prioritisation of needs in any context. There is also plenty of scope for more research and analysis on how the benefits of interventions are shared out between men and women, from the household level to the community level.

49. The suggestion made by the UN coordinator to possibly use Islamic interlocutors is to be welcomed. Such an initiative could open lines of engagement with the Taliban, but the aid community must be aware of the limits of such dialogue, and to think creatively about the types of Islamic interlocutors they can contact. It has been suggested by the Gender Advisor to the UN system in Afghanistan that in the long run the aid community could attempt to broaden the perspective of the Taliban, by exposing them to alternative interpretations of Islam. While this approach is to be welcomed, and the Taliban appear to be receptive to Islamic overtures, they also appear unwilling to accept any interpretations, which deviate from their own specific Hanafi codification of Islamic doctrine.

50. The long-term internalised perspective shared by those who have been in the region for a considerable number of years has been well articulated by Najia Zewari (CDAP, cited in Gender Advisor's report on Mission to Peshawar): changes in gender disparities based on deep-rooted cultural beliefs and customs cannot be transformed within one project cycle, one cannot generalise and devise policy for the whole of Afghanistan based on experiences from one province or region, knowledge of and respect for Afghan culture as well as appropriate communication skills are essential, and projects and programmes should be context specific as far as possible. Whilst the aid community should enter into dialogue with the Taliban authorities and work towards incremental change with minimum confrontation, as suggested earlier, it should also keep a watchful eye on the macro-level trajectory of Taliban policy over

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INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE STUDY ON DECREE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Female Employment in Afghanistan: A Study of Decree # 8

- Final Version -

6 February, 2001

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Contents:

the last six years, especially in issues relating to women (progress vs. backsliding).

51. With regards to the decree, the UN gave serious consideration to the possibility of stopping assistance activities for a time-bound period. Those who advocate for the use of conditional aid in the process of engagement would like to see aid operations limited to the strictly humanitarian and life-saving rather than developmental and capacity building measures. Such an approach misses the fact that the boundaries between these areas of activity are frequently blurred (as noted in the NSP rider paper). Commentators have observed that conditionality is inconsistent with General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and ultimately harms those for whom assistance is intended to be life-saving (King, 1997). It should be noted that disengaging would, to an extent, harm women, children and other vulnerable groups without necessarily eroding discrimination against them or advancing their rights.

52. In the ongoing debate about engagement, there also remains a lack of clarity as to the point at which it becomes more efficacious to disengage and discuss principles from beyond the context than to engage and discuss from within it. Those responsible for taking such a decision must carefully consider the likely consequences of such a course of action based on timely information from a network of reliable informants. The more embroiled one is in field-level realities the harder it seems to be to define the "bottom line" for disengagement. The impact of a disengagement by the aid community may in fact not have a major influence on the overall Afghan context, given the larger geopolitical dynamics that are at work (i.e. proxy backers, drugs, terrorism, smuggling, etc.). The aid community, from donors to field workers, often seems to have difficulty seeing beyond its own relatively limited sphere of influence. If the aid community disengages and hence is not delivering aid, it then has limited space or credibility from which to engage over issues of principle. A termination of activities also leads to a loss of credibility among Afghans. In the post-sanctions climate, disengagement followed by reengagement maybe even more problematic than maintaining a continued dialogue.

53. According to the third and fifth of the seven principles of the strategic framework, international assistance cannot be subjected to any form of discrimination, including gender, and cannot support a presumptive state authority which does not fully subscribe to the principles contained in the founding instruments of the UN (human rights, rights of the child, CEDAW). Taliban restrictions on female employment as codified in the most recent set of decrees pose a difficult challenge to these fundamental principles guiding the operations of aid agencies in Afghanistan. If the Taliban are evolving into a more organised, structured and coherent authority or even government, consolidating their hold over Afghanistan and reconstituting state structures then the operational environment which gave birth to the SFA may soon change. This does not necessarily undermine the case

for a structured, coherent, co-ordinated and principled approach, but the aid community should be ready and willing to re-examine the assumptions upon which its actions are predicated. NSP was designed as a roadmap to facilitate the core return and re-engagement of the UN system after the withdrawal caused by the August 1998 US cruise missile strikes. As well as re-examining SFA there is a need for the UN to elaborate a strategy which fits with the current political climate.

54. The aid community's noted preference for working with civil society and community structures is called into question by the observation made in the NSP rider that community activities are not necessarily "good" and institutional support "bad". While it is useful for the aid community to be mindful of the full range of Afghan constituencies with which they could engage, they must also look further into the ways in which these constituencies are connected and disconnected to and from each other.

55. There has been some debate concerning the role of female Afghan professionals residing in Pakistan and abroad. It has become increasingly difficult for this constituency to advocate for change given the incessant removal of the most effective and talented female Afghan advocates to other locations, a process exacerbated by schemes such as UNHCR's Women at Risk Resettlement Programme. Once removed from the context their effectiveness as agents of change within Afghanistan is greatly reduced while their credibility as advocates suffers due to their temporal and spatial distance from the country. With some notable exceptions, the inadequacies of Afghan women themselves in pursuing this agenda, or in trying to improve their situation can, at least partially, be attributed to their co-option into the strategies and politics of their menfolk and the dominance of the extended family as the fundamental unit for negotiating the Afghan social and political landscape.

9. Conclusions

56. Difficulties with female employment in Afghanistan did not begin and will not end with the Taliban, but are a deeply ingrained feature of Afghan society. The "woman question" has always been closely tied to the politics of groups with competing agendas. In relation to the gender issue, there is a need to look both before and beyond the Taliban. The decree serves as a warning to those who would even indirectly challenge the Taliban's views on gender, Kabul women, women's morality and ownership of that morality. The Taliban are asserting their self-ordained role as guardians. The international community must respect the fact that ultimately it is up to Afghans to decide the role that Afghan women play in the public sphere.

57. While there is no doubt that Afghanistan is in need of assistance, the aid community must avoid projecting Afghans inside Afghanistan

solely as "victims" whose weaknesses and vulnerabilities need assisting, but rather emphasise the strengths and capabilities of Afghan individuals and communities. Where they can, Afghan women are being creative, in order to continue work, since economic considerations and the needs of the family are a priority. Given that work endows them with a certain amount of status and rights within the family it goes without saying that any threats to their position as working women have a considerable psychological impact.

58. Clearly stated policies on gender equality and/or equity and over-arching strategies for gender mainstreaming are promoted at the higher levels of UN agencies, but not well-articulated "down the line". Because they are not well understood, efforts continue to focus substantially on equality/equity of access at the expense of considerations of equality of control. The absence of co-ordination on gender programming means that approaches are often contradictory rather than complementary, and thus do not constitute a coherent effort which underpins the Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming. The findings of this study strongly indicate that to be effective, both in the short and longer term, implementation strategies - from advocacy focus to project activities - need to be less confrontational with respect to their exclusive focus on women, and more adapted to social and Islamic values.

59. While recognising the importance of Afghan women, and the wide spectrum of their needs and experiences, and their role in successful programme implementation, it would seem wise to continue approaching them in a less visible and abrasive fashion, in the context of Islam and the family. There is a need to "insulate" expatriate male staff from Afghan women, even when opportunities arise, which make it appear unnecessary to do so. There is a need to exercise caution in relation to the scale, nature and implementation of programmes that involve female Afghan employees, particularly in more fraught environments, such as Kabul, where the authorities are sensitive and highly damaging rumours spread fast. Although it is equally important to recognise the need for Afghan females to be involved in monitoring and evaluation activities. There is a need for the aid community to keep better track of the "policy climate" by monitoring the documents issued by the Taliban, and observe the themes and trends which emerge, such as a growing assertiveness, and a desire to control and deploy externally introduced resources.

60. Even though Afghanistan may be moving from being a "failed state" to being a "rogue state", the issue of recognition remains a potential feature of the political landscape. Whilst the aid community is mandated to deal with the humanitarian sphere, it should still pay careful attention to broader politico-military developments. There is a need for those closest to the field to be attentive to the larger scale and longer term trajectory of their dealings with the Taliban (progress vs. backsliding). The aid community should also remain aware of the

desperate, predatory environment and harsh economic situation within which agencies make paid employment available. The international community needs to be more realistic about the situation in Afghanistan: extremely harsh economic conditions prevail, many are unable to meet even basic needs, and many Afghans are reluctant to plan their future inside the country. In relation to the decree and the statutes, it is unclear whether the Taliban are seeking to act as a more responsible "sovereign" government or simply seeking to divert resources made available from outside. The politico-military picture points to the former, while the predatory environment points to the latter.

61. There is a tendency among aid agencies to try and ignore and avoid the authority of the Taliban. It is important to recognise that agencies can only go so far with this course of action. Agencies need to be aware of the potential limits of any authorisation that any given office within the Taliban movement may issue. While unilateral action by an agency may result in swift progress over specific issues related to female employment, agencies should take careful note of the ramifications of their actions for the aid community as a whole, if only because these consequences may eventually feed back and impact their own operations. The aid community must also be aware that there are limits to exploiting the apparent inconsistencies within the Taliban movement. Agencies should also be cautious of shifting non-health sector projects into the health sector, so as to exploit the opportunities offered by the exemption on staff.

62. Those aid actors closest to the field, are generally keen to avoid confrontation, to maintain a dialogue and to be patient. NGOs are often keener to continue discussions with the Taliban, believing that it is possible to gain support from more moderate elements within the movement, while simultaneously keeping their distance from the scrutiny of more conservative elements. This situation raises the question of whether there is a "bottom line". Those further from the field (including special interest groups and UN HQs) countenance the suspension or termination of projects as a legitimate part of the negotiation process. The decree challenges those that argue that progress can be made through sensitive low-key dialogue to identify more clearly the fruits of their labour. On the issue of disengagement, it seems that while the impact of the withdrawal may be major at the micro-level (damaging communities) it is likely to be minor at the macro-level (limited impact on the Taliban). Disengagement is out of step with both the thinking of local communities and some aid actors. It risks harming those that the aid community are trying to assist, it reduces the credibility of aid actors in Afghanistan, and diminishes their ability to have any sort of influence.

63. Social change is organic and continual, and as such cannot be successfully engaged with on an episodic basis. There is a fundamental loss of credibility and authenticity for Afghans and aid actors alike, once they remove themselves from the Afghan context. Outspoken campaigns

by special interest groups located far from the field, may be seen as a threat to the aid agencies' role as providers of assistance, and are seen as somehow inauthentic and exploitative by some within the Afghan community. As frustrating and problematic as the situation for agencies operating inside Afghanistan may be, there is a need for tolerance and support for their actions as they are experiencing first hand the tumultuous and sporadic process of social change. Any spatial or temporal distance from this process makes it increasingly problematic to make an effective contribution to social development in Afghanistan. It is too easy to criticise and berate from afar; the challenge is to nurture positive change from within. Focussing on assisting developments within Afghanistan, rather than attempting to transform the society from afar, may help Afghanistan avoid the rentier status, that has subjected it to the vagaries of the interests of external proxy agents. Change should be "inside-out" rather than "outside-in".

64. Without wishing to state the obvious, the aid community and advocates should choose issues that are relevant to the needs and issues of Afghans living within Afghanistan, to avoid giving the impression that women are political pawns to be used as and when proxy agents find it expedient to do so. If the "sticks and stones" of the American cruise missiles did not sway the Taliban then the words and sanctions of the international community are unlikely to force a change in position. The issue is not whether we deal with Afghan women (and by extension female employment) but how we do this most effectively. The point may be not to isolate and deal with gender issues from a confrontational standpoint, but rather to treat gender issues delicately and recognise how they run like fine threads through every aspect Afghan society. In relation to gender issues, education can either reinforce existing practices in Afghanistan, or gradually give Afghans potentially new perspectives on the role (and employment) of women in the public sphere.

65. It may be appropriate for the aid community to continue to adopt low key and culturally sensitive ways of engaging with Afghan women. This could mean addressing the family as a whole, and not exclusively focusing on women and girls, and being mindful of a whole range of needs (both male and female) which exist. Without wishing to homogenise the experience of Afghan women, they should perhaps be approached in a role which fits a more culturally apt and Islamic model, rather than one based on "alien", "Western" concepts of the woman as an individual and independent social agent.

66. The international community needs to recognise the powerful economic interests which underpin the Taliban, and the resilience of the religious, moral and political ideas and heritage upon which the movement appears to base its position. In order to be proactive and to exert pressure, the international community must choose its (Islamic) interlocutors carefully and be aware of the web of interests within which they are located. Ultimately, there is a need to work towards a more consensual Afghan society, while recognising the limitations of

external intervention.

A.1 ToR

Inter-Agency Task Force Study on Edict and its Implications

1. Review context and events surrounding issuance of edict; this should include a chronology of what happened when.

2. Provide an analysis of existing situation, taking into account previous similar events/declarations pertaining to the employment of Afghan women, in order to clarify perceptions and role/response of the aid community

3. Track and analyze the implications and impact of recent edict in order to illustrate, for example, how it affects women employees of aid organizations, how it affects beneficiaries/programme implementation, knowledge, attitude and perspective of the general population, relations between the aid community and the authorities, potential funding implications, etc

4. Analysis of "larger picture"/overall policy including terms of engagement.

5. Determine what the exemption for the health sector means in practice.

6. Keep the Inter-Agency TF updated and provide a report within.... weeks. (Timeframe for different items to be decided.)

A.2 Chronology of "decree" related events

Sources:

NGO Forum (2000). Female employment update from NGO forum, Kabul. 25 July. Kabul: NGO Forum
WFP (2000). Kabul household survey - Edict related events: WFP activities prior to the edict barring female employment UN/WFP responses in response to the edict. 11 August. Islamabad: WFP
WFP (2000). Targeting of WFP subsidised bread sale programme in Kabul and the Taliban edict banning the employment of women. letter WFP/AFG/777. 16 August 2000

Year Month Day Person/Org Issue Detail Location

1995
Aug 20 Taliban ? Statute on Activities of the Domestic and Foreign NGOs statute
Nov Taliban ? announce that women are forbidden from working order Jalalabad
1996
Sep Taliban ? announce that women are forbidden from working, and that women are only allowed to leave their homes when necessary (e.g. medical emergencies) order Kabul
1997
Jun 27 Taliban ? edict no. 496 edict
2000
Mar 28 MoP / WFP ? planned WFP survey meeting Kabul
Jun 17 V&V ? order the closure of all "home schools" and suspension of community-based vocational training programs for women in Kabul order Kabul
19 Taliban / UN ? inspection of WFP survey compound Kabul
20 CSO / WFP ? re: survey meeting Kabul
21 WFP ? interviews of surveyor applicants Kabul
22 WFP ? interviews of surveyor applicants Kabul
23 SMU ? first meeting of SMU board meeting Islamabad
25 WFP ? training of surveyors commences Kabul
28 Taliban ? Statute on the activities of the domestic and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan. In Official Gazette No. 792 statute
29 HoA ? UN position requesting Afghan women employees to remain at home meeting Islamabad
Jul 5 MoP / NGOs ? requesting 'to provide information to approve the authorisation of your organisation for employment of female staff' letter Kabul
V&V / MoJ ? detailing NGOs that employ female staff and the numbers (WFP, GAA, CARE, ACF, Parsa, CIC, SCA, MEDAIR and Habitat) letter Kabul
6 MoP / UNOCHA / ACBAR ? informs that - version 1 - 'no UN/NGOs can hire Afghan women regularly/temporarily, because such an action is against Islamic Emirates Policy' - version 2 - 'based on a decision by the... Minister's Council, no national or international NGOs or United Nations agency can formally or informally employ females because it is opposed to the policy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' letter Kabul
9 Taliban / Parsa ? Mary MacMakin and her staff arrested arrest Kabul
10 MoP / NGOs ? summarised the letter, stated that this is a final decision and supersedes all previous protocols and MoU. All women working for NGOs should be dismissed meeting Kabul
12 MoFA / UN ? minister indicates this decree will not supersede previous agreements meeting Kandahar
? Mary MacMakin and her staff released
16-20 Taliban / UN ? meetings between Eric de Mul, DRir UNOCHA, WFP CD with various Ministers meetings Kabul
18 Taliban / UN / NGO ? formally imposing a ban on the employment of Afghan women in foreign and non-governmental organizations, with the

exception of those employed in the health sector 'within the framework of the rules of the Islamic Emirate's relevant departments' proclamation Kandahar

20 MoP / NGOs ? 'Afghan women can by no means be employed in these agencies since it is against the policy of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan... The relevant authorities as MoFA, MoP and the department of Social Affairs are to pursue the matter seriously and prevent any such actions. In case of violation, the violating agencies and NGO's (sic) should be prosecuted and legal accountability would take place with them through the relevant organisations. In the event that presently there are women employed they should be immediately dismissed' letter Kabul

23 MoP / WFP ? the decree is irrevocable and will be applied without exception meeting Kabul

24 V&V ? Women Bakery #2 to close order Kabul

MoPH / WFP ? WFP female monitors may not visit hospitals letter Kabul

NGO forum meeting Kabul

25 CARE / MoP ? CARE told that the decree has been signed by Mullah Omar, and so it is now a decree meeting Kabul

26 MoPH / WFP ? WFP's 'no monitoring, no food' decision meeting Kabul

31 ACBAR ? 'exact text' of decree distributed

? MoFA 'Memorandum' issued to NGOs detailing decree implications and requirements for co-ordination with Taliban authorities text Kabul?

UN HoA ? main decisions taken at the meeting are summarized as follows:

1. no-new project proposed by the Taliban authorities should be approved

2. All UN Afghan female staff will be requested to stay at home until further notice
3. An information campaign through radio will be launched to inform the Afghan people on the impact that this ban may have on UN assistance activities
4. Support from the GoP will be sought through meetings of Ms. Melek with relevant high placed women in the Pakistani government
5. Negotiations should continue. Mr. Donini will be in Kabul between July 30 and August 3 for this purpose

Aug 1 Capacity Building TF ? ToR meeting Islamabad

3 V&V ? public bathhouses closed order Kabul

6 Kandahar RCO / MoFA ? Authorities unhappy with the SG statement meeting Kandahar

MoFA / UNOCHA & WFP ? no women surveyors to complete the WFP house-to-house survey meeting Kabul

6-7 Taliban / UN ? made clear that WFP will not be permitted to implement the survey meeting Kabul

6-7 UN ? Note Verbale letter Islamabad?

7 Radio Shariat ? announces that CSO and other Taliban authorities will implement a household survey in co-operation with WFP broadcast Kabul

8 Taliban / UN ? working group meets for the first time meeting Kabul

TETF ? meeting meeting Islamabad
MoJ / WFP ? querying why WFP women's bakeries were continuing letter Kabul
MoJ / WFP ? issues notice to disclose female SBS staff details and bakery locations notice Kabul
9 Norah Niland / NGO ? to explain about TETF
? to establish an associated TF meeting Kabul
OCHA Afg & Pak / WFP / MFA ? decree meeting Islamabad
ACBAR / NGOs ? Agreed to implement an information gathering campaign
? Agreed to maintain a non-confrontational approach and continue dialogue with Taliban meeting Peshawar
10 ACBAR ? Questionnaire distributed Peshawar
MoJ, V&V / WFP ? threats to WFP staff in pursuit of female SBS staff details
11 HoA discussion of 4 possible measures:
? immediate media campaign
? no access to UN aircraft for Taliban officials
? SG letter to Taliban
? WFP Ex.Dir. trip to Afghanistan cancelled meeting Islamabad
13 Taliban ? "statute" of guidelines for UN issued unilaterally
? "statute" of guidelines for NGOs issued unilaterally statute
14 MoP / WFP ? letter from MoP??MoFA?? to WFP Kabul SO, claiming that the women's bakeries violate the decree issued 6 July
? remarks made threatening the physical safety of the women working in the bakeries letter Kabul
Capacity Building TF ? update meeting Islamabad
NGO forum ? meeting Kabul
Kabul TF purpose:
? collect information on developments related to the edict, the "Statute" and others
? follow and possibly promote the formation of a joined point-of-view (opinion)
? NGOs to write individually to the authorities to express their unhappiness (in soft wording) on the implies accusation that NGOs were to some extent promoting and/or involved in prostitution meeting Kabul
15 MoP / WFP ? threats to at least one Women bakeries
16 MoP / WFP ? WFP advised to close all Western bakeries, effective immediately
? WFP Deputy Country Director met with Planning in Kabul, no change in the position of Planning meeting Kabul
17 WFP ? General bakeries to close as well as women's bakeries conference call
MoFA / WFP ? female bakeries can reopen provided WFP does not employ any of the female bakers meeting Kabul
Kabul TF ? discussion of WFP bakeries closure meeting Kabul
18 TETF ? decree meeting Islamabad
20 Taliban / WFP & OCHA ? UN coordinator and WFP Country Director to travel to Kandahar meeting Kandahar
UNICEF / CFO ? Country director for discussion re: multiple indicators survey meeting Kabul

V&V / NGOs ? Reminding NGOs re: decree
? 'herewith, it is written to you to make NGOs attentive accordingly'
letter Kabul
22 Kabul TF discussed:
? Permission to re-open women's bakeries
? Letter requesting NGOs and other international organisations to buy the official "Gazette"
? Permission from MoPH for MEDAIR and SC to resume health activities
? MoPH would not get involved in defining the word "health"
MoP / CARE ? Widow programme meeting Kabul
23 ASG ? Item 2 - interaction between the aid agencies and the Taliban authorities in light of the decree meeting Islamabad
SC ? Discuss issues pertaining to Afghanistan meeting New York
28 Capacity Building TF ? feedback meeting Islamabad

A.3 Survey of decrees etc.

A.3.1 Communications in July and August 2000 from the Taliban, restricting female employment with aid agencies

In ACBAR's archive of communiqués, letters and decrees issued by the Taliban (starting February 1997) there are at least 43 documents relating to female employment, of which 18 explicitly mention restrictions on female employment with aid agencies. So, although Decree Number 8 (dated 19 July 2000 / 17.04.1421) states that "any previous edict in this regard is null and void" it is important to recall that it has emerged from a litany of similar communications. One expatriate NGO interviewee goes so far as to argue that "The problem of the edict is nothing new, it's just a rehash of everything that happened before and the wording is insulting".

Current Taliban attempts to restrict female employment with aid agencies in Afghanistan do not hinge on a single document. In July and August 2000 a number of different, and at times contradictory and confusing , communications were issued by the Taliban, which prohibited the employment of women with aid agencies (ANGO, INGO and UN).

? 5 July Proposal # 2982
MoJ raised the issue of 'the suspension of the female work at the foreign offices and international organisations and NGOs' with the Minister's Council of the Taliban (03.04.1421).

? July 6 Letter
MoP informed ACBAR and UNOCHA that "based on a decision by the... Minister's Council, no national or international NGOs or United Nations agency can formally or informally employ females because it is opposed to the policy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

? 10 July Decree # 980

Introduction

stated that 'the employment and continuation of work of the Afghan women in the domestic and foreign non-governmental agencies, is banned' (08.04.1421). Follows from proposal number 2982.

? 16 July Letter # 787
MoP informed ACBAR Kabul that 'In relation to the employment of the Women by the Afghan and International NGOs the unanimous view of the mission is that the Afghan women by no means can be employed in these agencies since it is against the policy of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The stance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is absolutely clear and obvious; Afghan women in Islamic Emirate territory must not be allowed by any means to work in United Nations, Foreign Agencies and International & National NGOs. The relevant authorities as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Planning and the department of social affairs are to pursue the matter seriously and prevent any such actions. In case of violation, the violating Agencies and NGOs should be prosecuted and legal accountability would take place with them through the relevant organs. In the event that presently there are women employed, they should be immediately dismissed.

? 19 July Decree # 8
>From the Special Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan stated that "Information and complains have received about female employment that in foreign agencies & NGOs has paved way for adultery, which is practically commenced and going on... Therefore, in order to prevent adultery and its bad effect in the country, the Planning Ministry and other relevant offices should ban the employment of Afghan women in foreign agencies and NGOs. As of need, however women can only work in health section within the framework and law of the Emirate's relevant offices. Though it requires more attention and control by the Emirate, any previous edict in this regard is null and void." (17.04.1421)

? 24 July Decree # 397
stated that 'the employment and continuation of work of the Afghan women in the domestic and foreign non-governmental agencies, is banned'. Follows from proposal number 2982 (24.07.1421)

? 30 July Letter # 56/61
GPLSA informed WFP Kabul that 'as per the instruction of His Excellency Amir-ul-Mominin, contents of decree #980 dated 17.04.1421 (19 July 2000) of Presidency of Ministers Council, and observation of items #1 & 2 of article # 5 of law regarding the activities of National and International NGOs in Afghanistan . WFP hereby requested, taking all the above issues in consideration, to refrain from employing female staff in its organisations and follow up the rules and regulations'.

? 30 July Letter # 944
MoP asked ACBAR Kabul to 'inform all foreign and national agencies' that 'The decree no. (8) dated 17/4/1421 (19 July 2000) from the Special Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has arrived and instructed

as follows. <<text as cited in point 5>>'

? 10 August Letter # 663
MoFA forwarded the text of Decree # 8 to ACBAR with a request for their 'cooperation in informing concerned agencies'.

? 11 August Letter # 2025/1575
V&V asked ACBAR to inform NGOs that 'according to the orders # (980) dated 8/4/1421 of the Respected Presidency Office of the Ministers and # (397) dated 22/4/1421 of the High Office of IEA, the employment and continuation of work of the Afghan women in the domestic and foreign non-governmental agencies, is banned.'

A.3.2 Related communications in July and August 2000 from the Taliban

The current attempts by the Taliban to restrict female employment with aid agencies should not be viewed in isolation. In July and August 2000, several other related issues have been raised in documents issued to aid agencies by the Taliban. Namely:

? the need for Taliban representatives to participate in aid agency surveys
? requests from the Taliban for information on female aid agency staff
? details of the type of female education that is permissible
? statutes on the activities of UN agencies and NGOs

These issues are also central features of relations between the Taliban and the aid community, and impact on discussions over female employment:

? 28 June "Statute"
"On the activities of the domestic and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan" published in Official Gazette No. 792.

? 11 July Decree # 1010
Issued by the Minister's Council, stating that 'all the surveys that local and foreign agencies (I/NGOs) would conduct, will be illegal/invalid and unpractical, unless participated by the representatives of IEA' (CSD, MoP, MoFA and GDLSA) (09.04.1421).

? 29 July Letter # 919
MoP asked ACBAR to 'please kindly inform NGOs so that they quickly provide the necessary information concerning employment of female staff and their field of activities, for performance of further activities'.

? 7 August Letter
MoJ asked WFP Kabul: 'Please provide us with information that. how many female employees have been hired by WFP Kabul in those bakeries' while also asking WFP to explain 'whether the employment of the females in the women bakeries in this situation, is not against the edicts of

Amir-u-Mominin?' (07.05.1421)

? 13 August Letter
The Council of the Kabul Religious Scholars informed the Respected Muslimyar Agency that 'according to the Sharia of prophet (PBUH) female education in vetinary, human medicine and in religion is allowed provided it is not resulted in Fetnah (sedition), Sharia Hejab/Pardah (veil) is there/abided by and the female has no access to men' (13.05.1421)

A.3.3 Summary statistics for decrees etc. (1997-2000)

Key

* - mentions issues relating to women
** - mentions female employment
*** - mentions restrictions of female employment
italic - copy of text unobtainable

Year * ** *** Total

1997 4 7 0 11
1998 2 4 7 13
1999 1 3 0 4
2000 0 11 11 22

Total 7 25 18 50

A.3.4 Table of decrees etc. (February 1997 - present day)

Year Month Day To:
Organisation From:
Organisation From: Person Ref/No.: Re:

1997
** Feb NGOs Nangarhar Foreign Relations Department Guidelines for Governmental and NGOs
24 Provincial Planning and NGO Affairs Departments MoP Qari Deen Mohammad
24 ACBAR MoP Qari Deen Mohammad
* Mar V&V Notice from V&V
** MoPH / Amir-ul-Mominin Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahed & Mofti Mohammad Masoom Afghani Notice from V&V - Appendix II
Rules of work for the State hospitals and private clinics based on

Sharia principles
* V&V - administration department Mawlawi Enayatullah Baligh Notice from V&V - Appendix III
The role and regulation of V&V
8 ICRC/UN MoFA / V&V Cassettes, narcotics & alcohol
11 ACBAR MoFA Cassettes, narcotics & alcohol
20 ACBAR V&V Al-Haj Mawlawi Qalam-u-Din Letter No. 7962 - Beard length and hair-cutting
Apr 4 ACBAR MoFA 181 Letter
8 ACBAR Kabul Municipality Mawlawi Abdul Majeed Consultation with the planning department of KM
May 6 MoPH 177/132 Letter
27 ACBAR MoFA 172 (?) Work permits for Afghan nationals
** Jun ACBAR V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin Employment (Annex 1: For all international and national agencies; Annex 2: For hospitals and clinics
** 4 ACBAR V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin NGO staff regulations and rules and conditions for female employees
12 V&V 69 Letter
15 ACBAR Department of Madrasa Support for training programme
19 V&V 76 Letter
** 20 UN V&V Employment & Health
Jul 7 Kabul Traffic Department
12 ICRC Kabul Traffic Department Mejahid Alhaj Mohammad Alsam Driving permits and number plates
15 MoPH Letter
** 16 V&V Support to women
Aug 11 Nordic NGOs (DACAAR, NAC, NCA, SCA)
* Sep 2 V&V Mawlawi Qalamuddin Women and hospitals
Sep 3 ACBAR MoFA Surveys and statistic activity
** 3 ACBAR MoPH Dr. Sayed Fazel Rabbani ID cards for NGO female Afghan employees
21 MoFA V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin V&V preventing normal NGO activities
* 21 Foreign media Taliban Rules and regulations for foreign media
Oct 13 Amir-ul-Mominin Mullah Mohammad Omar (Mujahid) Changing the name of Government to Emirate
1998
*** Jan ACBAR General President Mawlawi Refiullah Muazin Restriction on the employment of women
Feb 14 UN/ACBAR V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin 210/130
14 V&V 208 Letter
28 Cabinet of the IEA Decision and approval of 28 February - re: Relocation of NGOs
Mar 2 3099 Decree of the Ministers'Council of the IEA
** 10 Caretaker Shura Al-Haj Mullah Mohammad Rabani Decisions and decrees of the Ministers Council
11 ACBAR MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab Qazizada Registration with the MoP
Mar 18 Cabinet of the IEA Alhaj Mullah Mohammad Rabani 786 Issue No. 3099 - Relocation of NGOs

** 18 MoPH Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin ID cards for female staff in the health sector
Apr 10 40 Letter - re: transport?
28 Acting Council of the IEA Al-Haj Mullah Mohammad Rabani 367 Decree "on the control of administration activities of schools by the Ministry of Education"
** May 13 Mawlawi Qalamuddin Declarations saying that all NGOs should observe the Shariat, especially in connection to female involvement in health activities
** 14 UNDP/
UNOCHA V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin ID cards for female staff in the health sector
*** 19 UNDP/
UNOCHA V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin 16/13 Restrictions on the employment of women in the health sector
*** 24 V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin 15/12 Restrictions on the employment of women in the health sector
27 V&V Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin 84 Inspections of offices by V&V
30 MoFA 161 Letter - re: transport?
* Jun 3 Radio Shariat Girls schools must be shut down
*** 9 V&V Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Meeting - Female employment (except for ICRC, WFP, Care) (and education for girls over 9) cancelled
*** 9 NGOs V&V? Alhaj Mawlawi Qalamuddin 138/101 Letter - Female educational and vocational activities cancelled
15 MoP? 53 Letter
* 16 V&V Mawlawi Qalamuddin Private schools for girls in Kabul cancelled
*** 20 V&V Mawlawi Qalamuddin 181/130 Letter - 1) vocational, handicraft and educational activities for women to cease, 2) ID cards for women in the medical sector 3) constructional, developmental and medical activities with only men, can continue
24 MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab 367 Details of Decree (28/04/98): 1) MoE to administer schools 2) assistance to schools to be delivered to the IEA 3) no direct contact between assistance organisations and schools 4) MoE and MoP to report to the Acting Council of the IEA
29 INGOs MoP Minister of Planning Meeting - all offices of INGOs would by order of the IEA be relocated to the Kabul Polytechnic within one month's time
30 Acting Council of the IEA -
Mullah Mohammad Rabbani NGOs Letter, re: relocation to polytechnic
Jul 1 ACBAR MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab Qazizada All international organisations to move to the Kabul Polytechnic Institute
1 ACBAR MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab Qazizada NGOs and foreign agencies to conduct their transport activities in accordance with the IEA regulations (esp. Items 25 & 26)
7 ACBAR MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab Qazizada 333 Letter, confirming need for residences and offices of NGOs to relocate to the Polytechnic buildings
Aug 17 UNDP Work and Social Affairs Makhdoom Mawlawi Abdul Salam Saadat NGOs working in the fields of carpet weaving, carpentry,

engraving, tailoring, embroidery etc. to obtain a permit from Work and Social Affairs
25 UNOCHA Jalalabad Deputy Planning Directorate - Eastern Region Dr. Aminulhaq Attack on UN office and personnel in wake of US cruise missile attack (21 August)
Sep 18 Torkham Border Police Branch Police Department Mawlawi Ahmad Taha Qadiri No problems to be created for the travel of aid community vehicles
*** Dec 8 MoJ Poor widows allowed to go out from their houses to work. Married women whose husbands are still alive are only permitted to go out from the houses and do work if their husbands allow them to do so

1999
** Jan 15 UNDP/
UNOCHA V&V Female staff permitted to perform duties in health activities. ID cards for female staff working in health affairs
Feb 12 MoP - Nangarhar Province - Planning Department Acting Council of the IEA Mawlawi Abdul Kabir NGOs and government departments to work through MoP, in Eastern Zone
27 V&V Mawlawi Mohammad Sharif 1580 Letter, re: interviews and pictures of females inside the offices of some foreign NGOs
Mar UNDP/
UNOCHA MoFA Confiscation of alcohol from UNDP officials at Kabul International Airport
30 Herat Traffic Department 115 Letter
** Apr 28 V&V Islamic regulations for Government Hospitals and Private Health Facilities
28 WFP (Islamabad) V&V Role of V&V vis-à-vis international organisations and NGOs
May 4 UN V&V Beards and dress code
4 UNOCHA Nangahar General Director of the Eastern Region Mawlawi Habibullah Beards and dress code
9 UNDP MoFA 33 Letter, need for aid agencies to correspond with other government departments through MoFA
* Jun 3 UN V&V Mawlawi Mohammad Wali 1086 Letter, Vehicles carrying female staff
11 Planning Department of the MoI
NGOs Relations Department Governor of Herat Number plates and driving permits
22 Radio Shariat Punishment of those who trouble aid workers
28 All diplomatic missions, UN agencies and INGOs Embassy of the IEA Punishment of those who trouble aid workers
** Jul 20 Labour and Social Affairs Alhaj Mawlawi Makhdoom Abdul Salam Saadat Female employment
Aug 17 UN Secretary-General Human Rights violations, child soldiers and IDPs
Sep 5 UNDP/
UNOCHA V&V Mawlawi Mohammad Wali Removal of pictures from health facilities
Oct 15 UN Security Council

2000
*** Jul 5 MoJ 2982 proposal to the minister's council of the IEA -
the suspension of the female work at the foreign offices and
International organizations and NGOs
(03.04.1421 /
05.07.2000)
** 6 UNDP MoP 122 Letter: re: employment of females
(04.04.1421 /
6.7.2000)
*** 10 Presidency of Ministers Council 980 Decree re: the employment
and continuation of work of the Afghan women in the domestic and foreign
non-governmental agencies, is banned
(08.04.1421 /
10.07.2000)
** 11 Council of Ministers 1010 Decree re: the presence of Emirate
representative in every survey that the Foreign or National agencies
(9.4.1421 /
11.7.2000)
***

13 Habitat Kabul Work and Social Affairs Alhaj Mawlawi Abdul Gheyas
(Qanee) 580 Restrictions on the employment of women
(14.04.1421 /
16.07.2000)
** 15 UNDP MoP 137 Letter: re: employment of females
(13.4.1421 /
15.7.2000)
*** 16 ACBAR MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab "Qazi-Zadah" 787 Letter re:
Employment of women
** 17 UNDP Kabul MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab "Qazi-Zadah" 137 Letter re:
Use of IEA staff when local and foreign organisations conduct surveys
(13.04.1421)
** 18 ACBAR MoFA 575 Letter re: Use of IEA representatives in surveys

(16.4.1421 /
18.7.2000)
*** 19 Respected Office of the IEA 8 Decree
(17.04.1421 /
19.07.2000)
*** 24 High Office of IEA 397 Order: re: employment and continuation
of work of the Afghan women in the domestic and foreign non-governmental
agencies, is banned
(22.4.1421 /
24.7.2000)
** 29 ACBAR MoP Maulavi Abdul Tawab
(Qazi Zada) 919 Letter re: Request for information on female employees
(27.04.1421 /
29.07.2000)
*** 30 WFP Kabul Labour and Social Affairs Alhaj Maulawi Abdul Ghias
Qaneh 56/61 Female employment
(28.04.1421 /

30.07.2000)
*** 30 ACBAR MoP Maulavi Abdul Tawab
(Qazi Zada) 944 Letter re: contains the exact text of the decree
(28.4.1421 /
30.7.2000)
*** 31 MoP Letter re: IEA decree on female employment
** 2000 Aug 1 UNDP MoP 163 Letter: re: employment of females
(01.05.1421 /
1.8.2000)
** 7 WFP Kabul MoJ Mulla Mohammad Aman Letter re: request for information on female employees
(7.5.1421 /
7.8.2000)
*** 10 ACBAR MoFA 663 Letter re: Exact text of the decree
*** 13 The Respected Muslimyar Agency Council of the Kabul Religious Scholars Alhaj Mawlawi Agha Gulabi Female employment
(13.05.1421 /
13.08.2000)
** 13 MoP MoJ Torabi 1130/605 Memo: re: information on women's bakeries
(13.5.1421 /
13.8.2000)
** 23 WFP Kabul MoP Mawlawi Abdul Tawab Qazi Zada 193 Letter re: information on women's bakeries
(23.05.1421 /
23.8.2000)

Other

*** ? ? ? ? art. No. 4 art. No. 5 the rules related the recruitment of the female
*** ? ? ? ? art. No. 5 art. No. 7 the law related to recruitment of Afghan nationals in diplomatic missions, foreign offices and the international organizations

A.4 Impact of decree on NGOs

? female employees
? programme implementation
? health activities
? dealings with authorities & communities

? data for ACF, CIC, CARE, GAA, IAM, IRC, MEDAIR, MSF, PARSA, SCA, SCF

(US) supplied by NGO Forum Kabul (25/07/00)
? data for ADA, AHSAO, AREA, ATA/AP, SCA supplied in responses to ACBAR decree questions (15-22/08/00)
? data for CHA, HNI, IAM, Ibn Sina, SCA, NAC, Mazar Civil Hospital, Malalaie Maternity Hospital from UNICEF (August 2000)

Key

Kab. Kabul
Kan. Kandahar
Gha. Ghazni
Jal. Jalalabad
Pak. Paktia
Lag. Laghman
Kun. Kunar
Noo. Nooristan
Say. Saydabad
Maz. Mazar-i-Sharif
War. Wardak
Bam. Bamyan Markazi

Org. Loc. Impact Dealings with
Authorities & Communities
On female employees On programme implementation on health activities

ACF Kab. All female staff still working in clinics and feeding centres
Home visiting is stopped (women work in clinics), to be reviewed on weekly basis All training has been suspended Some Wakils refused access to the female home visitors in their gozars following the announcements on the radio
ADA Kan.
Gha. Supervisor sent home with salary till further notice.
Asked to work with women beneficiaries in her locality and submit the report through her husband Works in close link and co-operation with the participating communities.
Communities provide enormous support to ADA. Enjoys a good reputation with the authority as well
AHSAO Jal.
Pak. Beside that there is restriction on women involvement, have not ignored the role of women in the project Beside the ban on women to work, the villagers are in favour of female education, specially small age girls; therefore they are going to continue the education of their small age girls in unofficial ways.
Primary school for girls (Paktia). Matter discussed with the local authorities, but they advised us to get permission from the MoE in Kabul - still await a response
AREA ? Female staff continue their work with the help of local Shuras.

Women still employed
BUT
Reduced their activities because of the sensitivity and seriousness of the issue Female staff continue their work with the help of local Shuras
Currently, as always, the authorities have two different positions:
Official position - that is clear with no flexibility and they want to implement their revolutionary decree
Informal position - that many of them are not happy with the total ban on women employment and they do want to cooperate to get permission for women employment under certain condition and criteria.
As I have observed during past few days during my negotiation there are great differences between their views.
Based on our experience and the way they behaved in the past as well as at present they will not come with a solution. We should go with a solution by using community potential, international pressure and purpose in a way that they couldn't say no
ATA/AP Lag.
Kun.
Noo. Staff asked to leave the clinic.
Paying salary to the staff till the result of negotiation of ACBAR with the authorities Women still working
BUT
If the authorities order the termination of female staff, the ATA/AP will comply but will pay them until the final settlement of the matter
Provincial authority visited the clinic and ordered the female staff to be relieved
Authorities did not show any compromise in negotiations (over health)
BUT
Local authorities have not asked the ATA/AP to relieve female staff
BCA ? Women still working - yet to respond to directive Letter from authorities asking them to stop the women involved in home based vocational training
CARE Kab. All women at home Monthly distribution to 7,100 widows and their families on hold
CHA Kab. Has been registered / permitted by V&V to work
CIC Kab. Orphanage for girls still functioning
GAA Kab.
Say.
Kan. Female monitors at home (Kabul)
Female beneficiaries still producing items in their homes (food-for-work) Women visiting houses protocol signed in Kandahar
HNI Providing support and protection to female workers at field level: hiring husband or male family member, free accommodation/housing, suitable ways of training, good incentives, provision of transportation with Mahram 64 women in malaria control programme - work has been going on fine without any disturbance
IAM Kab. Female helpers in houses stopped.
Blind school field workers at home at present Mental health programme for returnee refugees in Herat has been stopped for the time being.

This study was commissioned by the Inter-Agency Taliban Edict Task Force (TETF) to look at Decree # 8 and its implications. The ToR are given in Appendix A.1. The paper is based on a number of pieces of primary and secondary material, which are listed thematically in A.8. Much of the primary material was collected by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. The study was produced between 18 August and 18 October 2000. Minor revisions were then made to the text, in the process of producing this final version for distribution. The authors wish to sincerely thank the interviewees for freely giving their time and opinions. Furthermore, a debt of gratitude is owed to those individuals and organisations that gave help, support, advice and feedback throughout the course of the project. The analysis presented in this document expresses the views of the authors, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any organisations affiliated to the study.

1. Context and events surrounding the issuance of the decree

1. Current Taliban attempts to restrict and control female employment with aid agencies in Afghanistan do not hinge on a single document or event. Since February 1997 there have been at least 43 Taliban documents relating to female employment, with the number reaching a peak in July and August 2000 (see A.2 and A.3). These recent decrees, edicts, letters and proposals are widely seen by aid actors, as a significant reversal after a general trend throughout 1999, towards a growing relaxation of strictures that inhibited the mobility and employment of Afghan women. It is argued by some that this increasing visibility of women is evidence of some small success of the advocacy efforts by UN and NGO agencies who have promoted women's participation in line with their stated policies of gender equality and/or equity . These recent documents also represent a breach of trust built up between the Taliban and the UN following re-engagement after the August 1998 missile strike and subsequent killing of a UN staff member.

2. Decree # 8 (dated 19 July 2000, 17.04.1421), from the Special Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, assumes particular importance as it states that "any previous edict in this regard is null and void". Although this decree came as a surprise to those outside the context (see A.7), for aid agencies working within Afghanistan it is a nadir in an ongoing process. The current attempts by the Taliban to define, restrict and control female employment within aid agencies should not be viewed in isolation. A number of other documents issued to aid agencies, most notably the Statutes governing UN and NGO relations, point to a growing concern and assertiveness on the part of the Taliban to establish control over aid agency activities and those of Taliban line ministries.

3. There are different perspectives within the aid community concerning the rationale, motivation and specific context surrounding the issuance

All health programmes continuing
BUT
Female expats not going to clinic as regularly as before Staff a mixture of MoPH and agency.
Lack of prior agreement (protocol) with MoPH contributed to the closure of mental health programme
Ibn Sina ? planning to recruit some more female staff
IRC Kab. In Kabul province (Khaki Jabar) have suspended income generation activities
Malalaie Maternity Hospital Kab. Some female doctors terminated
Mazar civil hospital Maz. Some female staff working in non-medical section like finance and admin have been terminated
MEDAIR Kab. Female monitors at home.
Female beneficiaries still producing items in their homes (food-for-work) Directly employed staff have been staying away from clinic, but will come back slowly and low profile V&V visits to clinic and MoJ visited office
Mertarlam
Hospital Lag. Women stayed home for two days Directive was received from the MoPH in Kabul allowing them to continue to work
MSF No impact More than usual number of visits from V&V in clinics
NAC Planning to recruit some more female staff Has a written protocol for their activities, which includes permission for female health staff
PARSA Kab. Suspended
SCA Kab.
Gha.
Lag.
War. All female staff at home (Kabul).
Until further notice will let the teachers (home schools) continue their work.
1 female consultant sent home (Ghazni).
148 female staff sent home on paid leave.
(144 health and 4 education; total 300 health and 800 education) Schools closed (53,000 patients and students affected) 13 clinics that have 35 female staff (in and around Kabul city) were stopped for a few days in mid-July 200
11 female staff in 2 clinics in Charbagh and Islamabad districts of Laghman stopped from working for a few days after the decree
Clinics running with only male staff
BUT
MoPH has confirmed that health workers can continue work Signed a protocol with MoPH in 1999 that includes employment of female staff.
Had meetings with provincial level authorities (education directors).
Informed SCA orally, that SCA should allow the female staff (girls education) to continue.
They were not willing to issue any written statements
They stressed that they had no competence officially (make written statements) to go against decisions taken by ministries.
SCA has not considered any formal settlement with any authority.
SCA's decision to continue female work in the education programme is

based on the positive (oral) statements by the Education Directors, and by community leaders.
Discussed the 13 clinics with the PHC director of MoPH in Kabul, which resulted in the resumption of the clinics and their staff.
Had V&V visit to 3 clinics
SCF
(US) Kab. Community activities low profile.
IDP camp activities stopped
SERVE Kab. Contract on the female staff of the solar cooking project has been suspended Directive received from authorities
NGOs Jal. Women continuing though in a low profile.
Women feeling uncertain and insecure
NGOs
& UN Bam. No women allowed to work.
Does not seem to have spread outside to rural areas
NGOs Jal. Not much impact

A.5 UN and NGO national female employees & beneficiaries (September 2000)

NGOs (11):

No. Organisation

1 AGHCO
2 AHSAO
3 DACAAR
4 DCA
5 Ibn Sina
6 NAC
7 NPO - RRAA
8 SCA
9 SERVE
10 SIEL
11 SGAA

UN agencies (10):

No. Organisation

1 CDAP
2 FAO
3 IOM
4 UNCHS (Habitat)
5 UNDCP

6 UNESCO
7 UNICEF
8 UNHCR
9 UNOPS/ARRP
10 WFP

NGO Category Location TOTAL
KBL JAA HEA KDH MZR FBD Other
AGHCO Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0
Total Employees (health) 4 4
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 4 4
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 150 150
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 150 150
OVERALL TOTAL 154 154
AHSAO Total Employees (exc. health) 2 2
Total Employees (health) 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 2 2
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 100 100
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 100 100
OVERALL TOTAL 102 102
DACAAR Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0
Total Employees (health) 13 13
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 13 13
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 325 325
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 325 325
OVERALL TOTAL 338 338
DCA Total Employees (exc. Health) 5 5
Total Employees (health) 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 5 5
Total Beneficiaries (exc. Health) 120 120
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 5 5
OVERALL TOTAL 125 125
Ibn Sina Total Employees (exc. Health) 0 0 0 0
Total Employees (health) 8 26 13 47
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 8 26 13 47
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 0 0 0 0
OVERALL TOTAL 8 26 13 47
NAC Total Employees (exc. health) 0 557 0 557
Total Employees (health) 20 0 14 34
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 20 557 14 591
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 7,825 0 7,825
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 0 7,825 0 7,825

OVERALL TOTAL 20 8,382 14 8,416

NPO-RRAA Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0 0 0
Total Employees (health) 2 3 19 24
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 2 3 19 24
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 10,000 20,000 49,500 79,500
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 10,000 20,000 49,500 79,500
OVERALL TOTAL 10,002 20,003 49,519 79,524
SCA Total Employees (exc. Health) 279 0 597 0
Total Employees (health) 149 7 256 30
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 428 7 853 30
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 0 0 0 0
OVERALL TOTAL 428 7 853 1,288
SERVE Total Employees (exc. health)
Total Employees (health)
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health)
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health)
Total Beneficiaries (health)
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health)
OVERALL TOTAL
SIEL Total Employees (exc. health) 1 1
Total Employees (health) 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 1 1
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 30 30
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 30 30
OVERALL TOTAL 31 31
SGAA Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0
Total Employees (health) 17 17
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 17 17
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 500 500
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 500 500
OVERALL TOTAL 517 517

UN Category Location TOTAL
KBL JAA HEA KDH MZR FBD Other
CDAP Total Employees (exc. health) 8 8 0 0 16
Total Employees (health) 7 5 29 42 83
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 15 13 29 42 99
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 324 453 0 0 777
Total Beneficiaries (health) 11,135 417 9,620 23,032 44,204
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 11,459 870 9,620 23,032 44,981
OVERALL TOTAL 11,474 883 9,649 23,074 45,080
FAO Total Employees (exc. health) 19 5 1 4 17 46
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 19 5 1 4 17 46

Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
OVERALL TOTAL 19 5 1 4 17 46
IOM Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0 0 0 0
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 0 0 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 12 0 0 0 12
Total Beneficiaries (health) 9 6 1 3 19
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health)i 21 6 1 3 31
OVERALL TOTAL 21 6 1 3 31
UNCHS Total Employees (exc. health) 363 70 138 635 162 1,368
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 363 70 138 635 162 1,368
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 4,759 2,337 1,265 4,787 4,089 17,237
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 4,759 2,337 1,265 4,787 4,089 17,237
OVERALL TOTAL 5,122 2,407 1,403 5,422 4,251 18,605
UNDCP Total Employees (exc. health) 1 0 1
Total Employees (health) 0 4 4
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 1 4 5
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 15 0 15
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 15 0 15
OVERALL TOTAL 16 4 20
UNESCO Total Employees (exc. health)
Total Employees (health)
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health)
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health)
Total Beneficiaries (health)
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health)
OVERALL TOTAL 0

UNICEF Total Employees (exc. health) 1 1 2
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 1 1 2
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) ? ? ?
Total Beneficiaries (health) ? ? ?
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) ? ? ?
OVERALL TOTAL 1 1 2
UNHCR Total Employees (exc. health) 5 1 6
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 5 1 6
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 0 0 0
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 0 0 0
OVERALL TOTAL 5 1 6
UNOPS

ARRP Total Employees (exc. health) 0 0 92 92
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 0 0 92 92
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 9,800 1,000 0 10,800
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 32 32
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 9,800 1,000 32 10,832
OVERALL TOTAL 9,800 1,000 124 10,924
WFP Total Employees (exc. health) 357 1 2 32 83 2 477
Total Employees (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 357 1 2 32 83 2 477
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 385,779 6,816 8,888 26,727 112,785 22,455 563,450
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 385,779 6,816 8,888 26,727 112,785 22,455 563,450
OVERALL TOTAL 386,136 6,817 8,890 26,759 112,868 22,457 563,927

Overall summary:

All NGOs Category Location TOTAL
KBL JAA HEA KDH MZR FBD Other
Total Employees (exc. health) 280 0 0 0 0 557 604 1,441
Total Employees (health) 157 69 3 13 0 7 302 551
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 437 69 3 13 0 564 906 1,992
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 30 0 0 0 0 7,825 120 7,975
Total Beneficiaries (health) 0 10,167 20,000 0 0 0 49,825 79,992
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 30 10,167 20,000 0 0 7,825 49,945 87,967
OVERALL TOTAL 467 10,236 20,003 13 0 8,389 50,851 89,959

All UN Category Location TOTAL
Agencies KBL JAA HEA KDH MZR FBD Other
Total Employees (exc. health) 744 7 82·182 718 112 162 2,007
Total Employees (health) 0 0 7 9 29 3 42 90
TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 744 7 89 191 747 115 204 2,097
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 390,550 6,831 21,349 29,445 117,572 22,455 4,089 592,291
Total Beneficiaries (health) 9 6 11,135 417 9,620 35 23,032 44,254
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 390,559 6,837 32,484 29,862 127,192 22,490 27,121 636,545
OVERALL TOTAL 391,303 6,844 32,573 30,053 127,939 22,605 27,325 638,642

All Category Location TOTAL
Agencies KBL JAA HEA KDH MZR FBD Other
Total Employees (exc. health) 1024 7 82 182 718 669 766 3448
Total Employees (health) 157 69 10 22 29 10 344 641

TOTAL EMPLOYEES (inc. health) 1181 76 92 204 747 679 1110 4089
Total Beneficiaries (exc. health) 390,580 6,831 21,349 29,445 117,572 30,280 4,209 600,266
Total Beneficiaries (health) 9 10,173 31,135 417 9,620 35 72,857 124,246
TOTAL BENEFICIARIES (inc. health) 390,589 17,004 52,484 29,862 127,192 30,315 77,066 724,512
OVERALL TOTAL 391,770 17,080 52,576 30,066 127,939 30,994 78,176 728,601

A.6 Acronyms

AAR Azadi Afghan Radio
ABC Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACBAR Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ACF Action Contre la Faim
ADA Afghan Development Association
AFP Agence France Presse
AGHCO Afghan/German Help Coordination Office
AHSAO Afghan Health and Social Assistance Organisation)
AP Associated Press
AREA Agency for Rehabilitation & Energy Conservation in Afghanistan
ASG Afghanistan Support Group
ATA/AP Anti Tuberculosis Association (Afghanistan Programme)
AWN Afghan Women's Network
BAAG British Agencies Afghanistan Group
BBC British Broadcasting Corporation
BR Business Recorder
CD Country Director
CDAP Comprehensive Disabled Afghans' Programme
CEDAW Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHA Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance
CIC Children in Crisis
CSM Christian Science Monitor
CSO Central Statistical Office
DACAAR The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DCA Dutch Committee for Afghanistan
ET Electronic Telegraph
FAO Food and Agriculture Organisation
FMF Feminist Majority Foundation
FP Frontier Post
GAA German Agro Action
GAF German Afghanistan Foundation
GoP Government of Pakistan
HNI HealthNet International
HoA heads of agency
HQ Headquarters

IAM International Assistance Mission
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP Internally Displaced Person
IEA Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
IGO Inter- Governmental Organisation
INGO International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM International Organisation of Migration
IRC International Rescue Committee
Irna Iranian News Agency
JCC Joint Consultative Committee
LAT Los Angeles Times
MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Pak)
MoFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoJ Ministry of Justice
MoP Ministry of Planning
MoPH Ministry of Public Health
MoSA Ministry of Social Affairs
MoU Memorandum of Understanding
MSF Medicins Sans Frontiers
NAC Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NCA Norwegian Church Aid
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation
NNI News Network International
NPO-RRAA Norwegian Project Office - RRAA
NSP Next Steps Paper
NWFP North-West Frontier Province
OIC Organisation of the Islamic Conference
PARSA Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Support for Afghanistan
PBUH Peace Be Upon Him
RCO Regional Coordinators Office
SBS Subsidised Bread Sale
SC Security Council
SCA Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SCF (UK) Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom)
SCF (US) Save the Children Fund (United States)
SFA Strategic Framework Agreement
SG Secretary General
SGAA Sandy Gall's Afghanistan Appeal
SIEL Sanayee Institute of Education & Learning
SMU Strategic Monitoring Unit
SO Sub-Office
TETF Taliban Edict Task Force
TF Task Force
TNI The News International
ToL Times of London
ToR Terms of Reference
UN United Nations
UNCHS (Habitat) United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDCP United Nations International Drug Control Programme
UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNDPI United Nations Department of Public Information
UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan
UNOPS/ARRP United Nations Office for Project Services / Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme
US United States
V&V Department for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
VOA Voice of America
WCRWC Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
WFP World Food Programme

A.7 Media survey

Year Month Day Source Headline

2000
Sep 5 AFP Taliban ban on working women hits hospitals
3 Dawn No end in sight for women's rights abuse
1 AFP UN aid to Afghanistan at risk
1 ABC UN aid to Afghanistan at risk from new statute
Aug 31 UPI UN refuses to work under Taleban's thumb
28 UPI Female workers targeted by Pakistani sect
27 ET We will kidnap aid workers and wed them
24 FMF Smeal and Leno unveil back to school campaign for afghan women and girls
23 UN Security Council members warn that Afghanistan's instability could spread to region
21 FP Afghan women working in poppy fields prefer other jobs
21 BBC Concern over Afghan widows
18 Irna Taliban allows U.N. to open women-run bakeries
17 UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Update No. 375
17 AFP Afghanistan needs outside help to face human rights tragedy: NGO
17 Irna Afghanistan-Taliban-bakeries
17 AFP Afghan Taliban allow UN bakeries to reopen
17 AP UN Can Reopen Afghan Bakery
17 BBC Taleban backs down over bakeries
17 VOA WFP/Afghanistan (L-only)
16 UPI Taliban denies jobs, bread to widows
16 BBC Taleban shuts 'widow's bakeries'
9 UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Update No. 374
5 Irna Pakistani paper critical to Musharraf's view on Taliban
4 UN Secretary-General urges Taliban to reconsider ban on women working for UN
4 AP UN warns Afg. women on edict
4 Reuters UN urges its female Afghan employees to stay home

4 Reuters UN presses Taleban to end women aid-work ban
3 UN UN officials work to end Taliban employment ban on Afghan women
2 UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Update No. 373
Jul 21 NNI UN, Taliban talks fail over women job ban
20 Reuters Talks on Easing Afghan Restrictions on Women Fail
20 AFP UN's Afghan chief fails to lift ban on working women
20 BBC Ban on Afghan women to stay
19 UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Update No. 371
19 CSM Tenacity under Afghan burqas
17 SJMN Afghan women tell of terrors
14 NNI Benazir raps Taliban for arresting women workers
14 CNN Afghan women unite in cyberspace against Taliban repression
14 TNI MacMackin hopes to resume work in Kabul soon
14 FP US happy as aid worker arrives in City
14 Dawn Deported United States social worker arrives in Peshawar
14 NNI US welcomes Ms. Macmakin's release
14 BR Women employment issue in Afghanistan being resolved: UN
13 Xinhua U.N. to Hold More Talks With Taliban on Women's Employment
13 RFERL UN: Progress Seen On Women Working In Afghanistan
13 ToL Kabul expels aid worker
13 PPI UN co-ordinator to discuss with Taleban ban on women working with NGOs
13 PPI Women involved in illegal activities, says Taleban
13 Irna UN makes progress on ban of female Afghan employees
13 Dawn Taliban to resolve women's job issue: UN coordinator
12 AP Taliban Fears Spies Among Women
12 Reuters Taliban Says Women Have History of Spying
12 NNI Taliban move against women workers
12 NNI Taliban ask UN, relief agencies to sack female staff
12 NNI UN official rushes to Afghanistan to discuss Taliban ban
12 UPI Taliban gives U.S. aid worker 24 hours to leave
12 AP U.N.: Taliban To Let Women Work
11 AP Fearful Afghan Women Stay Off Jobs
11 UNDPI UN envoy to discuss Taliban work restrictions against Afghan women
11 Xinhua U.N. to Discuss With Taliban on Edict Banning Women From Working
8 LAT Internet Gives a Voice to Afghan Women's Cause
3 Internews 13 schools for girls opened by Taleban in Kabul
Jun 30 NNI Taliban urged to allow women to work in WFP projects
26 ToL The women defying Taleban
May 23 NNI RAWA asks Pak to review 'pro-Taliban' policy
Apr 22 NNI RAWA asks Pakistan to change Policy towards Taliban
16 NNI RAWA gets HR prize
Mar 22 FP Clinton asked to help stop Afghan fighting
8 FP Afghan women urge world leaders to help end civil war
Feb 29 FP RAWA asks Pakistan to withdraw Taliban recognition
15 NNI United States asked to Review Afghan Policy
1999
Dec 12 FP UN asked to help end woes of Afghan refugees

of Decree #8. In the eyes of some, aid agencies were not adequately sensitive to differences within the Taliban movement and should have been more discrete and careful in the way in which female employees were recruited. Growing employment of women was accompanied by a perceived relaxation of rules and regulations, a sense that more women were travelling without mahrams , and an increasing number of older women being seen in Kabul with their faces uncovered. Frontline reversals and religious interpretations concerning causes for the drought added to the charged atmosphere. Much attention has been paid to the role of the WFP SBS survey in relation to the Taliban decree. Questions have been raised, in relation to the recruitment process for the surveyors, the numbers of women employed and the effectiveness of the authorisation that had been given. Perhaps even more significant than the events themselves is the ensuing mythology, which has evolved around this issue. Rumours, which spread with alarming speed and were at times divergent from reality, nevertheless had a significant and concrete impact on shaping the opinion of both the general public and those in authority.

4. The current situation for women in Afghanistan must be seen in terms of the impact of 20 years of widely destructive conflict, an often conservative and patriarchal society, and since the fall of the Communist government, a process of discrimination sanctioned by successive power holders. Since their emergence in September 1994 the Taliban have tied their Islamic credentials, as those in charge of the resacralisation of Afghanistan, to their ability to enforce their specific rigorous interpretation of Sharia law on Afghan society, with particular attention given to women. The way in which Kabul is controlled takes on a special significance given that it holds the last vestiges of the state apparatus. Some of the Taliban, and especially some rural and Pushtun constituencies within the movement, have a special antipathy to Kabul residents, not only because of their less traditional perspectives, but also because they are perceived as somehow morally lax. This has only added to the zeal with which rules and regulations are enforced. Since Kabul also has the highest concentration of aid agencies in Afghanistan, contact between aid agencies and women is extremely sensitive and comes under acute scrutiny.

5. It is felt by some that the imposition of sanctions in November 1999, and a growing awareness by the Taliban that their efforts to obtain recognition at the UN were not working, caused them to adopt a more negative stance towards the aid community. Currently Afghanistan is afflicted by the worst drought in at least the last 30 years. The UN estimates that it has affected 3 to 4 million people seriously and another 8 to 10 million moderately. In spite of this, between April and September over 100,000 refugees returned from Iran. This factor has added to economic pressures in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, which is already a marginalised city because of the peripheralisation of the Afghan economy due to the dominance of trans-border trade through the other major urban centres in Afghanistan. The repatriation scheme is set

2 UPI Women ask Canada to pressure Taliban
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to continue through to January 2001. In Kabul harsh economic conditions prevail and the possibilities for work are limited, resulting in high unemployment. Paid employment has, therefore, become a highly sought after commodity and the people who succeed in gaining employment are those who are best equipped to exploit a desperate and predatory environment.

6. In this resource scarce context there is bitter rivalry. It seems that families strategically deploy members on the basis of the attribute most suited to gaining employment at any given time (gender, qualification, occupation etc.). It seems equally important for families to establish and exploit as large a network of useful contacts as they can (Taliban, UN, NGO, commercial). In this environment aid agency salaries represent a gold mine for any who can access them, c.f. INGO salary for a doctor at $100 pcm and MoPH salary for a doctor working in the same hospital at $10 pcm. On an institutional level there is a simultaneous process at work, through which the Taliban are trying to draw resources and employment opportunities into their own domain, i.e. line ministries. Taking all this on board, in addition to the traditionally limited role that women have played beyond the domestic realm, leads to the following observation. In the difficult Afghan context, aid agencies are running risks when trying to either employ larger numbers of women or to push back the barriers on female employment. As a result, NGOs and UN agencies have to be cognisant of the fact that the provision of female employment risks amplifying the attendant socially disruptive processes, outlined above.

7. Decree # 980 states that the employment and continuation of work of Afghan women in the domestic and foreign non-governmental agencies, is banned, whereas decree # 8 bans the employment of women in foreign agencies and NGOs with the exception of the health sector (see A.3 for the full text of these decrees). From the discussions which have occurred between aid agencies and the Taliban, as a result of the issuance and content of decree # 8, it would appear that the latter are asserting their right to the ownership of Afghan women's behaviour on the grounds of morality. Whilst the decrees seek to limit contact between aid agencies and Afghan women on the grounds that it paves the way for immorality, observers have noted inconsistencies, in that contact between Afghan men and women is acceptable as long as it is controlled, sanctioned and initiated by the Taliban. From the perspective of some within the aid community, it appears that the Taliban, which has limited economic resources, is keen to siphon off funds from external agencies such as UN and NGOs, so as to control the deployment of resources and the employment of both men and women on their own terms. The Taliban is seen to be justifying this process with edicts and decrees couched in the language of preserving women's moral integrity.

8. While this decree is focused on restricting women's employment with aid agencies it is vital to not forget that enormous numbers of women

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are involved in economically significant yet crucially unacknowledged and unpaid employment within the home, in agriculture, poppy cultivation, carpet weaving, petty trading, and small-scale forestry among others.

2. Previous similar events and declarations

9. The current Taliban administration are heirs to ongoing tensions and contradictions within Afghan society, the roots of which can be traced back to Amanullah's reign, if not before. These tensions have been over issues of state, modernity, and religion, with the level of freedom that women were allowed to enjoy becoming a central feature of competing political paradigms. From the late 1950s Islamist and Marxist opposition movements developed alternative social and political programmes, often at extreme odds with the royalist Musahiban agenda. Friction generated by these competing perspectives on Afghan society, especially in relation to women, has been a recurrent motif from that time onwards, manifesting itself in the form of a variety of rules and regulations dictating women's access to the public sphere .

10. Since the emergence of the Taliban in September 1994, there have been certain moments when aid agency programmes have been suspended in response to Taliban restrictions on female employment. For example, OXFAM on October 14th 1996 (Kabul) and SCF (UK) on March 8th 1996 (Herat). Their requests that other NGOs follow suit met with little enthusiasm (barring other members of the SCF Alliance). It seems that the impact of these suspensions were nullified as (a) they were unilateral actions, (b) they did not enjoy widespread support as they were not seen to be an effective tool in changing Taliban policy and (c) there were concerns about the implications for Afghans of withdrawing or suspending aid.

3. Perceptions, role and response of the aid community

11. It is of interest to recall the way Alfredo Witschi-Cestari (former UN Coordinator for Afghanistan) summarised the aid community's response to Taliban gender policies in May 1997: '.the United Nations, its member states, and affiliated agencies and NGOs have been quick to condemn Taliban practices as "gender apartheid", but practice has rarely followed rhetoric. Some agencies and NGOs - such as UNICEF and OXFAM - have upheld principles of non-discrimination and have ended specific programmes if women are not allowed to participate. Others, including UN agencies, have instead responded affirmatively to Taliban decrees by avoiding to deal with the issue; accepting in silence new situations; inflating token successes or removing women from their visible positions in their programmes'. While UN and some NGO agencies claim an overall strategy of gender "mainstreaming" limited effort has yet been made by gender experts to translate this into practical, on-the-ground

implementation strategies. This reflects the overall weakness, to date, of efforts to operationalise "gender mainstreaming", and an absence of apt leadership, co-ordination, co-operation, and information sharing on gender issues.

12. From the NGO perspective the general response to the recent decrees that restrict female employment, can be characterised as follows: no disengagement, no confrontation, staying out of the political arena, approaching the Taliban through line ministries, keeping the dialogue open, moving slowly, keeping a low profile and adopting a wait-and-see attitude. There is also a recognition of the need to be patient, to not expect quick results or to respond with knee-jerk reactions when dealing with the authorities. Being conscious of their "status as guests" also seems to make NGOs more culturally sensitive in their behaviour and wary of taking a bellicose stance. In addition, an on-going feature of the NGO response is to try to avoid authority structures and to engage with them on a "needs-must" basis. That said, even though the recent decrees directly challenge the operation of NGOs (female employment) these agencies seem willing to continue their work within an increasingly restrictive environment. It appears that the NGOs have not defined a "bottom line" at which point they feel it is necessary for them to disengage from the Afghan context, if only on operational grounds.

13. The stance outlined above is justified by NGOs on the basis that the Taliban have not exhibited a great deal of concern about the well-being of particular population groups, that there are moderate elements within the Taliban movement who are receptive to low key NGO overtures and that the overwhelming priority of the aid community is to help Afghans overcome the many deprivations that threaten their survival. Related to this is the perception by some NGOs that it is more important to prioritise "concrete" livelihood issues related to family needs over more "abstract" notions of gender equity. In adopting this strategy, NGOs must be careful not to lose sight of the larger and longer-term implications vis-à-vis female rights.

14. The outspoken campaigns of special interest groups, who have adopted the "Afghan cause", but are located far from the field, are regarded by many aid personnel to be based on a poor understanding of the complexity of the situation, and to in effect undermine concrete initiatives that assist Afghan women, as well as their children and menfolk. Another difficulty with such groups is that they seem to believe that removing the Taliban will automatically eliminate the problems and obstacles faced by Afghan women. Gender relations in Afghanistan's patriarchal society are a deep-rooted and multi-faceted issue. The challenge is to define contextual interpretations of principles (e.g. CEDAW) and effective ways to implement them. Defining what the principles are is a necessary first step. Tensions exist between universalist and multiculturalist perspectives. But deeper still are tensions on the precedence to be given to universalist principles stated in UN charters and conventions, or the tenets of Islam itself. The various

interpretations of the latter - at the social as well as the political level - and the prevailing focus on "women only" within the debate on gender orientation, are at the root of much resistance. For those dealing with gender in the Afghan context, there are difficulties in having to simultaneously satisfy "purist" and "pragmatist" constituencies, which at times conflict. Responses by those dealing with gender risk being either so "measured" that they are overtaken by the speed and urgency of events, or formulated as part of a "fire-fighting" routine, which may be overly hasty and superficial. There is need throughout the assistance community for co-ordination and assessment of different approaches to gender programming - in particular to assess their relevance and effectiveness in increasing women's share in decision-making, participation, and benefits associated with assistance activities.

15. Since their emergence in September 1994, it is unclear whether the Taliban have moderated their stance over female employment. The NGO community must ask itself whether their overall engagement with the Taliban, presently exemplified by their response to the decree issue, leads to two steps forward and one step back or one step forward and two steps back. The response of one NGO should be noted as it offers an example of good practice. Careful preparation and groundwork was done in terms of assessing the impact and implications of the decree for employees and beneficiaries, before the NGO engaged in discussions with the authorities. The NGO also anticipated the suggestions the Taliban would respond with, assessed the feasibility of those suggestions in advance and met with the relevant Minister with their counter arguments prepared. Being prepared, proactive and versed in all the relevant documentation led to a successful outcome in relation to female employment. However, although beneficial to the individual NGO, the approach mentioned above does not contribute to a common approach from NGOs or the aid community as a whole.

16. Within the UN system there is a spectrum of opinion on the ways to respond to the recent decrees restricting female employment. There are those who argue that gender discrimination is deeply embedded in Afghan society and will not be affected positively by the aid community disengaging. Saving lives is seen as the over arching objective given the overall dire economic situation, the impact of the war and the drought. This approach is focused on doing "what works" rather than what reassures distant constituencies. The basic thesis behind this approach is that it is not an either-or situation; the right to life is paramount and must be secured while simultaneously tackling deep-rooted discrimination. Others contest the assumption that engagement can improve the female employment situation, and countenance the suspension or termination of projects as a legitimate part of the negotiation process. There seems a concern among UN HoAs that their authority to manage the decree issue may be overruled by UN agency HQs who seem more sympathetic to the latter position.

17. To date actions taken by the UN Afghanistan team, in response to the decree issue, have been as follows. Firstly, UN female staff were asked to stay at home, with their security being of primary concern. Secondly, the media has been used as tool to inform the Afghan public, and thereby hopefully have leverage over Taliban decision-makers. The reaction of the authorities to the coverage of the WFP bakeries closure showed that they are not insensitive to how they are perceived within Afghan society. Thirdly, the UN ceased to consider any new requests coming from the Taliban authorities. Fourthly, the UN adopted a more distant and formal stance in relations with the authorities. The Deputy Executive Director of WFP chose not to visit Kabul, and the High Commissioner for Refugees decided not to visit Kandahar, and raised the issue of female employment with Talib authorities in Herat. Fifth, the UN system in Afghanistan considered the types of leverage they may have over the authorities and whether they were prepared to use them. Sixth, the Secretary General's Special Representative to Afghanistan agreed to mention the issue of female employment in discussions with the authorities. Finally, it is to be welcomed that the UN and NGOs decided to work collaboratively on the decree through the forum of the TETF, and to consult with the donor communities. Although it is also important to recognise the differences of mandate and approach which exist between non and inter governmental organisations.

18. One of the assumption of the Strategic Framework (as further clarified in the NSP) is that in order to maximise the effectiveness of the international community in responding to the Afghan crisis, the system should "speak with one voice" and systematically pursue a more principled, unitary and coherent approach. Difficulties arise when individual UN agencies take a stance that differs markedly from the collective position of the UN system in Afghanistan. WFP's position that its operating principles over-ride the humanitarian imperative to save lives has raised lots of concerns. Such an approach risks politicising assistance, cuts across the Strategic Framework, risks victimising the victims and risks bringing into question the neutral and impartial nature of IGOs. This development sets a worrying precedent, which the donor community seem to be accepting in an uncritical fashion.

19. In response to the decree a "troika" of donors (the Ambassadors of Switzerland, Canada and Germany) held a meeting with the Taliban Ambassador in Islamabad at which they expressed their view that the decree was unacceptable and that the Taliban can expect resources for assistance to diminish considerably if it stays in place. As a constituency within the aid apparatus, the donors (ASG) could have leverage and could perhaps play a more collective and active role in relations with the Taliban.

4. Impact and implications of the decree